

began their work, either as sociologists or as administrators
 When, returned from their travels
 in 1898, they
 settled down to the heroic task of writing the history and
 anatomising the functions, of "local collective activity"
 in England, they were preparing, as they knew, to chart a
 jungle Their plan was as original in approach as it proved
 laborious and exacting in execution
 About what was
 beginning to be called "Gas and Water Socialism," something was being learned, in practice, through the exploits
 of the London County Council and other local authorities,
 but in 1898 and even much later, its relevance was very
 far from being seized, even by politicians, even by professional economists About the origins and history of
 English local government, next to nothing was known, by
 the ordinary student of history, it played no part in his
 text books They say, with their usual modesty, in the
 Preface to the final pair of volumes which round off their
 monumental work on this subject, that they "have done
 their best in an almost untilled field " As a matter of fact,
 of course, they not only tilled the field they showed what
 tilling means The investigation and research, to
 say nothing of the immense intellectual effort of planning,
 that lie behind these volumes, are almost terrifying to contemplate
 The work was begun in 1898, it was not until
 1906 that the first, and not until 1929 that the last, volume
 appeared Prodigious as the toil of research, it was
 accomplished with a scholarly

thoroughness and an
accuracy that have only been challenged on
small points
by the experts, while those who know most
have paid
the warmest tributes to the manner in which
the entire
vast and intractable material has been
moulded and
shaped

Roughly, the scheme of this gigantic work
involves a
two-fold division Four volumes are dedicated
to the
structure of Local Government in England—The
Parish and